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Liquor Barn won't cut state wine list

Winery owner calls reversal 'amazing'

BY GREGORY A. HALL • GHALL@COURIER-JOURNAL.COM • OCTOBER 2, 2008

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The Liquor Barn chain yesterday reversed itself and announced that it will resume buying products from state winemakers who advocate allowing wine sales at grocery stores.

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Roger Leasor, president of Liquor Barn, which has three stores each in Louisville and Lexington, had said Tuesday that he would no longer buy from wineries that supported the grocers' effort to change Kentucky law. He said doing so would be paying them to promote competition with Liquor Barn.

Kentucky is one of 16 states that do not allow wine sales in groceries. A bill to allow the sale failed in the legislative session earlier this year, but another effort is expected.

"I'm not going to fight with my neighbors," Leasor said yesterday.

Leasor said he received a handful of e-mails and one telephone call after The Courier-Journal reported his decision not to buy from some wineries. He said the reversal came from internal discussions yesterday.

Leasor said Liquor Barn has supported Kentucky growers' efforts for 15 years to build a wine industry.

"We want to live in wine country," he said. "We think it's a terrible shame that the grocers are using our little, tiny wine industry to further their legislative aims. And that's how we see it. I understand that other people see it differently."

Eddie O'Daniel, owner of Springhill Winery in Nelson County, said he had not been told by Liquor Barn of the reversal but called it "amazing."

In announcing the reversal, Leasor took issue with the number of cases that O'Daniel sold a year to Liquor Barn, saying it was 45 last year.

O'Daniel said he had meant to say that 1,000 cases were sold to Liquor Barn over the last five years and that last year's sales were more than 45.

O'Daniel said he appreciates the Liquor Barn business, but still wants to be able to sell his product in groceries.

"We have to expand our market in the food stores only because we need to grow our market for all the Kentucky farmers" growing grapes, O'Daniel said.

Earlier yesterday, a 19,000-member Kentucky grocery and food processing union threatened a

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boycott of Liquor Barn unless the retailer agreed to start buying certain Kentucky wines again.

United Food and Commercial Workers Local 227, a statewide union based in Louisville, said it would call for the boycott within 10 days if Liquor Barn didn't start buying the Kentucky wines again.

Reporter Gregory A. Hall can be reached at (502) 582-4087.

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